

HARTFORD STREET ZEN CENTER

ISSAN-JI

www.hszc.org

AUTUMN
2004

NEWSLETTER

Hartford Street Zen Center is a Soto Zen Buddhist temple located in the Castro district of San Francisco. Started in 1981 by a group of gay and lesbian Buddhist practitioners, HSZC is also called Issan-Ji, One Mountain Temple, after our founder, Issan Dorsey Roshi. We offer daily Zen Buddhist Meditation, Saturday Public Lectures, and Monthly One-Day Sitzings. Our resident teacher is Rev. Myo Denis Lahey.



An ashes interment ceremony was held for Zenshin Philip Whalen, our former abbot, on Saturday, June 26th. Zenshin died two years ago after a lengthy illness. The ceremony in the back garden was conducted by our practice leader, Rev. Myo Lahey.

Nancy Victoria Davis said, "The altar for Philip was done with much thought and care. The hole for his ashes was at the base of a good looking stone, shaped like a mountain, gray. Norman Fischer said something about how we all are born, live, and die and that is the way, and good friend and mentor Philip left his friends confused by all this. Philip was an embarrassment like the buffalo, the great plains, Yellowstone Park."

Many thanks to Peter van der Sterre and his son Sam for locating Zenshin's memorial rock at Tassajara and transporting it to our back garden.

Excerpt From Rev. Myo's Dharma Talk

This morning in a little while, we'll have a ceremony out in the backyard for the late Abbot Zen Heart Dragon Wind. I believe he studied quite closely the teaching that "the elbow does not bend outwards." This is a very strict teaching. You may have all heard of it before. Suzuki Roshi famously told people at Tassajara, "you may think I'm strict but if I was strict with you people, you'd all be running down the road in five minutes." But sometimes strictness is forced upon us whether we want it or not.

In Zenshin's case, he was quite sick for many years and acutely sick in the last few years. Several times hospitalized, he "flunked hospice twice" as he liked to say. He was quite sick and in a way that can be of great assistance to practice because it is a strict situation from which there is no escape. And a teaching such as "the elbow does not bend outwards" is in front of our faces the whole time, leaving no loopholes and no nest to hide out in.

When our body is failing or is afflicted in some way or we are in some other type of difficult situation, really cornered, then we have an opportunity to understand the elbow and its brilliant function. I believe that Zenshin studied this teaching very thoroughly. Because his study was quite complete, he recognized that he never actually arrived or actually left. He did not arrive to be abbot, and he did not get carted off to hospice a couple of times. In the fluid shape of appearances, it looked as though he arrived and departed, but actually it was not so. And therefore he is not coming home now as ashes, to be put in the ground. I think he understood all that, and we can begin to pay back our debt to our teachers if we also study relentlessly until we understand.

ZEN CENTER LIBRARY

*a rough unmarked white stone
rises behind a dark pit
two feet deep in the ground

the priest hovers fussily over
a round concrete reliquary --
in brown and black robes
he looks like a giant moth,
fanning incense clouds
into the bright air,
weaving mantras in the air
with a horse-hair whisk*

*then we step one by one
up to the trench and place
a tiny fragment of Phil's bones
into a white paper cone
which chutes the material
into the burial container below*

*Phil, what part of your anatomy
did I consign to the waiting earth,
was it a fragment of your tibia,
your metacarpal which propelled
into your great belly the exotic
foods you loved to ingest,
or a vertebra from your spine,
corrupted with the disease
that did you in at last --*

*I hope it was a tiny chunk
of your shiny skull,
the encasement of a brain
that understood very well
that the mind inside
is the cause of its own suffering,
and understood as well
the Way to get out of it*

*today we laugh
at all the zen hooey,
and vow to take it
more seriously
than ever*

by Jim Mitchell

Philip's Stone

By Peter van der Sterre

When the word got out that I was going to pick up my son Sam at Tassajara last summer, his mother, Mimi Manning, suggested that it might be a wonderful idea to find a memorial stone for Philip Whalen while we were there. I had spent several years with Philip at Tassajara, during which time he was heavily involved in Buddhist practice, which in his case, appeared to be just an emphatic continuation of his cranky/loveable self: "walking about in warm Spring rain." Philip, as most of you who knew him over an extended time, was a very creative complainer, who managed to be outspoken and just self critical enough to be loveable, forgivable, and an all-around pest.

When the idea of actually picking out a stone hit, I asked myself: "What would Philip do if he had this job?" It took very few minutes to realize that Philip would not have ever done such a project, because he was not the kind of person who actually did things, he just reported on them. Anyone who attended one of his several grand farewell testimonials knows that this was good enough for almost everyone who knew him.

Returning to my search, I decided to focus on Cabarga Creek, in honor of Philip's ode to this little wash that feeds into Tassajara Creek just below the dining room. There is a line from Philip's work, which refers to canoeing up Cabarga Creek, the joke being that unless you are there in the middle of a fierce winter storm, there is never any water at all in this draw.

One priest suggested that I get a "wild" rock for Philip's marker, but the more I thought about it, the more the question of choice and determining the virtue of a stone becomes a question.

Forgetting the ideal, and continuing on with my own considerations, I noted: (1) Every rock is quite wonderful, each in its own way; (2) I was not at all sure that the grandest rock would be the most suitable, since Phillip was a great appreciator of the castoff and the commonplace; (3) I did keep turning over the question of what angle Philip might take, or at least appreciate, and it occurred to me that he might favor any good result, however arrived at: insight, harsh effort, stealth or even coincidence; and (4) My conclusion was that the rock I was seeking should probably have some kind of curb appeal, but also should weigh less than 200 pounds.

I then began to stake out stones along Cabarga creek. There were quite a few candidates, but more and more I began to consider how heavy the really handsome ones looked and how high the creek bank seemed, up through uneven terrain, overgrown with willows and poison oak

About this time, Sam came over and announced that he had spotted a rock across from the Tassajara baths that he thought had promise. We examined this stone and found it to be good sized, quite close to our upper limit in terms of moving capacity. The stone was also triangular, and thus similar in shape to a seated monk or a mountain. It was embedded in the ground and appeared to be without design or intention (this is to say, not related to any earlier wall or garden

project). More striking perhaps than the singular aesthetic fit of the stone was the fact that this beauty was situated *right by a road* where our truck could drive up and park directly in front of it. The decision was literally made for us. We then applied some team effort to move this treasure up a plank and into the back of our pickup. We secured the stone with ropes and tie-downs and delivered the now sacred object to the Hartford Street Zendo the next day.

Arriving after Saturday lecture, I was pleased to see a good number of people out in front of the temple. The stone stayed wrapped in its rope and web straps, which provided enough hand-holds for 3 or 4 people to move it, in stages, to the back yard. The quest for the appropriate place was mercifully brief and a core group of a gardener, a rigger and a priest provided the intention and the direction required to locate the stone, a bit more deeply in the dirt, in an inviting corner of the garden that Issan Dorsey had begun more than 15 years ago.

When placed and washed down, the stone glistened, revealing granite detail and presence that I had not noticed or even suspected. In short, the stone is beautiful. We also then discovered that the rock face was strewn with lichen, which glowed in appreciation of the water and attention, after so many dry years at Tassajara.

Zenshin Philip Whalen Memorial Fund: Following Zenshin's ashes internment ceremony, board members announced the establishment of a fund in memory of Philip Whalen, to support Dharma teaching at HSZC. This fund will cover costs associated with Dharma teaching at HSZC, compensate guest speakers for time or travel, and contribute to stipends paid to Dharma teachers (including Practice Leader or Abbot). It can also be used to cover expenses associated with recording or distributing talks, photocopying materials for classes, etc. At the discretion of HSZC leadership, this fund can also defray tuition costs of residential Dharma students.

The Board has established a goal of \$5,000 in contributions by the end of 2004. If you would like to make a contribution to HSZC in Philip's memory, please indicate that your donation is intended for the Zenshin Memorial Fund.

Begging Bowl

Building Repairs: Last winter, John King hired John Byrne, assisted by sangha resident Alex Jacobs, to do much needed repairs to HSZC. They fixed leaks into the zendo from the front porch and shored up the back porch, repaired dry rot, reinforced support beams, and redid the floor and windows sills. Tiles on the front porch were removed, sealed, and new tiles were laid. A fund raising drive was held to help pay bills of \$5,000. We are deeply grateful to all who contributed when we asked.

Improvement Projects in the Works: Replacement of worn-out linoleum on kitchen floor. Repair of several doors and windows. Add third valve to garden irrigation system for the bamboo grove. Repair furnace, \$150 estimate. Replace disintegrating containment barrier for the bamboo grove.

Buckley: Our aging temple cat needs a teeth cleaning but due to a heart murmur, requires an ultra sound first. Estimated vet fee, \$800.

We are looking for donations and would appreciate any help you might give.



Gay Asian Pacific Alliance Rally In San Francisco: On Sunday, August 8th, Myo attended a rally in support of same-sex marriage, sponsored by GAPA. It took place in the park located at 19th and Wawona in the Sunset district, and featured members of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors and other public figures. Myo was asked to deliver part of the opening remarks. Here is his statement:

“Buddha said that there is no being of any description, in any universe in the ten directions, anywhere in the limitless past, present, or future, who is undeserving of loving-kindness. I strive to keep this breathtakingly radical teaching in my own heart in these troubled days, when it seems that more and more people are being drawn away by distorted doctrines from the living water of true spirituality, to the stagnant, poisonous pools of fundamentalism. Among these distorted teachings, which would, I believe, be soundly repudiated by Buddha, by Jesus, by the Prophet Mohammed, blessings and peace be upon him, and by all other spiritual teachers whose message hasn't been hijacked by political interests, is the idea that those of us who are NOT heterosexual are unworthy of love, incapable of meaningful commitment, and are, at best, victims of psychological dysfunction. Now we are reaching for the opportunity to prove how wrong are these twisted teachings, based, as they surely must be, on ignorance, fear and aggression. One of the ways we propose to do this is by standing upright in the midst of family and friends, neighbors and people of faith of every description, and entering into the timeless ceremonies of lifetime commitment to each other, as lovers, parents, home owners, wage earners, students, athletes, teachers, professionals of every kind, gardeners, quilters, shoemakers, cowboys and cowgirls, astronauts, poets, singers of songs, artists, kings and yes, queens, and by a simple ‘Yes, I will!’ put the lie to the dark mutterings of religion gone sour. My sisters and brothers, in this joyful and daunting time, let us look to our faith and to one another, for there is where we will find the strength, the wisdom and the compassion we need for all the days of our lives. Thank you!”

Tea Ceremony

by John King

I've been to two tea events recently. As you may know, dress and forms are very important to the Japanese. It's beautiful to see the elegant kimonos and the graceful movements. This last event was at Sokoji temple in front of the altar. As the ceremony was about to begin, Akiba Roshi lit the candles on the altar, and I was reminded that the first Jesuits in Japan saw similarities between the tea ceremony and the Mass.

Both the Mass and the tea ceremony came out of the simple act of sharing a meal or a cup of tea with friends. At Jesus' last meal with his disciples he said: Take and eat, this is my body. Take and drink, this is my blood.

Sen no Rikyu, the founder of the Japanese tea ceremony, was ordered by his lord, Hideyoshi, to commit hara-kiri (ritual suicide). Suzuki Roshi comments that just before Rikyu took his own life, he said: When I have this sword, there is no Buddha and no Patriarchs. He meant that when we have the sword of big mind, there is no dualistic world. The only thing which exists is this spirit. This kind of imperturbable spirit was always present in Rikyu's tea ceremony. He never did anything in just a dualistic way; he was ready to die in each moment. In ceremony after ceremony, he died and he renewed himself. This is the spirit of the tea ceremony.

Just after Jesus' death, two of his disciples were walking along a road. As they were talking about his death, a stranger joined them. Later, in sharing a meal with the stranger, they realized he was Jesus. As a child, hearing this story I thought, why didn't they recognize him from his appearance? I think what happened was, as they shared a meal, they suddenly could see the divine, the Jesus, in this stranger. Or as Shakyamuni Buddha said when he saw the morning star: Oh, it is wonderful to see Buddha nature in everyone and everything.

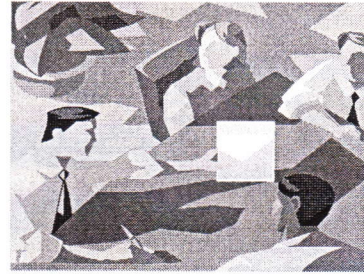
It is with this spirit that we live our lives.



Board Members Elected Since January

Board President – Ross Todd

Board Members – Jennifer Birkett, Judy Hoyem, Cynthia Kear, John King, Rick London, Mimi Manning, Larry Peiperl, Jeff Thomas, and Rev. Myo Lahey *ex officio*



Residents: Welcome to new residents Ed Masters, Alex Jacobs and Jeff Thomas. Our friend and fellow Dharma student, Francois, stayed with us for a month, before resuming his studies in southern California. Goodbye and thanks to Don Herald, for his many years as our Treasurer and good Dharma friend. Rev. Shoho lived here for several months and continues to make wonderful flower arrangements for us when she visits.

Garden: Sangha member Brian Bruning pruned the tree in the front garden to let more light into the garden and house. We are also very grateful for his generous plant donations. And thanks to Cathy Gouch for troubleshooting the irrigation system, to Tim Birkett for rewiring the irrigation timing box, and to Nancy Victoria Davis for the magnificent red dahlia in memory of Philip, now planted in the back garden.

Temple: Thanks to Brian Dipert, from Iron Bell Sangha in Sacramento, who donated a Mini-Disc recorder, to replace the magnetic tape recorder which had ceased working, and to Michael Donnoe for the lovely new temple seal for precept certificates and such.

Website and Weblog: We have a combined website/weblog, which you can visit separately or together:

Website: www.hszc.org
Weblog: <http://hartfordstreet.weblogger.com>

Appreciation to all the visiting reverends/teachers who have supported our practice: Jana Drakka, Dave Hazelwood, John King, Taiyo Lipscomb, Rin McCarthy, Kokai Roberts, Paul Rosenblum, Jeff Schneider, Peter Van der Sterre.



Support of Hartford Street Zen Center

Community Thrift Store – 625 Valencia St. at 17th. 415-861-4910. Support our temple by donating clothes, furniture, and books. Account #155.

Cala Foods – Register your Cala Card with the store, linking it to HSZC. When you shop and swipe your card, it credits a percentage to HSZC.

Membership at HSZC – HSZC survives only through the generosity and involvement of our members and donors. Practicing Members pledge monthly support of \$40 or at a level approved by the Board of Directors. Contributing members pledge \$60 a year, Supporting Members, \$500, and Patrons, \$1,000. Anyone, member or not, may join us for zazen at any time.

Garage Sale
Saturday, October 30
HSZC
57 Hartford Street

Donate Items
Stop By
Bring Friends!

415-863-2507

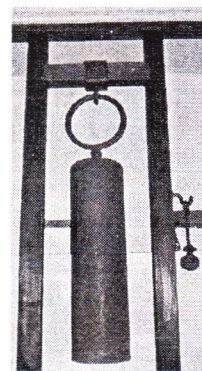
108 Bells

By Mary O'Toole

Do we have any volunteers for ringing 108 bells this evening? asked Rev. Myo. My hand shot up. I had meditated for years at home but was new to zendo meditation. There's a lot of ritual in the zendo, and I always wanted to be the person to gong one of those huge bells. Here was my chance. Four other women volunteered, and we all trooped downstairs to the bell in the zendo and gathered round Rev. Myo like groupies.

It took a full 30 minutes to organize how 5 of us would gong the bell 108 times. Our first problem was dividing 5 into 108. It wouldn't go. The answer is 21.666. The boyfriend of LadyOne figured that out on his calculator. Luckily, LadySix joined us at this time. So now the task was easier with six people. 108 divided by 6 equals exactly 18.

So how do you want us to handle this, the women asked. What exactly do we do? Well, Rev. Myo said quietly, you gong the bell and then do a full prostration. Repeat the procedure 18 times, each gong 30 seconds apart. And how are we to keep track of how many times we've done the procedure, asked LadyThree. After a moment of thought, Rev. Myo said, upstairs I have a string of exactly 108 beads that you can use to count with, and I will go and get it. OK, good, said the women.



Soon Rev. Myo returned with the beads. That's all well and good, said LadyFive. But how do we keep track of how many times we've gonged the bell. What with gonging, bowing, looking at the clock, kneeling, it would be hard to know whether that was the 9th or 10th time. It would be easy to lose count. We need to be able to mark off the beads. Yes, said Rev. Myo, good point. Well, he said, I have a small clippy thing upstairs that I can get so that each time you gong the bell, you move the clippy thing forward one bead. OK, good, said the women.

Just then, LadyFour informed us that she did not think she wanted to continue with the bell-ringing project and made a move towards the stairs. LadyTwo quickly but gently clutched LadyFour's elbow and pleaded with her ever so quietly: Please, don't leave us now. We need you desperately. LadyFour relented and remained.

When Rev. Myo returned with the clip, LadyThree asked: how can you tell where you were when you started moving the clip so that you know how many times you've moved it. The clip needs a point of reference. We need to mark off every 18th bead and then move the clip between the marks. Yes, I see what you mean, Rev. Myo said gently. Well, I think I have some kind of ribbon upstairs to mark off 6 sets of 18 beads. I'll go and get it. OK, good, said the women.

When Rev. Myo returned, LadyTwo volunteered to tie 6 small pieces of ribbon on the strand of beads, each ribbon 18 beads apart. That accomplished, we had one last drill: stand, gong, put down gong, bow, kneel, make full prostration, kneel up, move clip, stand, look at clock to determine correct time interval, pick up gong, gong again. OK, good, said the women, who by now felt informed enough to carry out this important ritual. As they disbursed to get seated for zazen, Rev. Myo could be heard saying softly to himself: "like herding cats."

108 bells rang out that evening with 30-second precision, and it was a wonderful experience – the unending knowledge and calmness of Rev. Myo, the camaraderie of the women, and the dedication of all to this important ceremony. In fact, I'm going to suggest to Rev. Myo that next year we try to have 108 people, each person responsible for one gong.

That could work.

Temple and Other Activities

We offer **zazen** every day except Sunday. Other temple activities include a **public lecture** Saturday morning at 10am, and unless it is a retreat day, the lecture is followed by tea, cookies and discussion. **Brief zazen instruction** happens at 8:30am on the 2nd and 4th Saturdays. The first Saturday of the month is a **retreat day** from 9am until 5pm (partial day attendance okay). The third Saturday is an **Introduction to Zen**, from 1pm to 4pm if at least two or three people pre-register. There is usually a **potluck dinner** for sangha members and their guests on the fourth Friday, at about 7:45pm. You can just come to the zendo for daily zazen, service, and Saturday lecture, but for all other events please contact HSZC to register by phone or email.

Practice Periods and Additional Evening Zazen

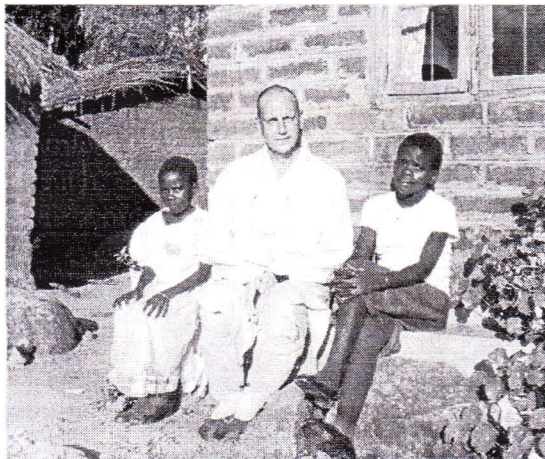
Some sangha members have expressed interest in having a practice period. Participants would make an expanded commitment to zendo practice for a specific amount of time, such as three or four weeks. One possible structure would be to have, in addition to all the usual weekly events, an evening class once a week and increased zazen, along the lines mentioned below. There would be special tea-and-discussion periods, and opportunities to meet with the practice leader. The study period might end with our December sesshin.

Suggestions have come up concerning additional practice opportunities for sangha members. One is for a period of evening zazen one or more times a week, between 7:30pm and 9pm. We need to know who would be willing and able to commit to participation in these proposed events. Please share your feelings with us.

Groups Meeting at HSZC

HIV Sitting Group: Thursday and Friday mornings, 10:30 to 11am. Informal meeting in garden afterwards. Lovers, friends and caregivers are welcome to sit with us.

GMBS: The Gay Men's Buddhist Sangha meets Sunday afternoons in the Zendo, 3pm to 4:30pm, followed by a social upstairs until 5pm. For gay, bisexual, transgender men of all ages and places on the path. Contact Steve Kline (415) 824-2671, or via email at stevekline@ix.netcom.com.



Benkong and Malawi:

Harold Lemke (Benkong) visited our temple last November. He facilitates an HIV support group in Malawi, Africa, and is currently in Taiwan helping out with the HIV community there.

Website Link:

<http://www.posicare.co.za/>

Newsletter Production

Editors:	Jennifer Birkett, John King, Myo Denis Lahey
Formatting/Design:	Mary O'Toole

Weekly Schedule

Morning	Monday – Friday	6:00am 7:00am 7:20am	Zazen Chanting/Service Soji (temple cleaning)
Evening	Monday – Friday	6:00am 6:40pm	Zazen Chanting/Service
Weekend	Saturday	6:30am♦ 7:15am♦ 7:35am♦ 7:50am♦ 8:30am – 9:00am 9:10am 10:00am	Zazen Morning Service Soji Break, or Breakfast, depending Zazen Instruction (2 nd and 4 th Saturdays) Zazen Public Lecture, Tea and Discussion
♦ Beginning October 9			



HARTFORD STREET ZEN CENTER

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